



# City of La Quinta

**AGENDA CATEGORY:**

**BUSINESS SESSION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSENT CALENDAR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDY SESSION:**   1  

**PUBLIC HEARING:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_:

**COMMISSION MEETING DATE:** June 11, 2012

**ITEM TITLE:** Discussion of the Open Space and Parks and Recreation Elements from the 2035 General Plan Update

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## **BACKGROUND:**

As part of the Annual Work Plan, Les Johnson, Planning Director and Andy Mogensen, Principal Planner, have been asked to present the draft Parks, Recreation and Trails and the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the 2035 General Plan.

## **OVERVIEW:**

The General Plan is a comprehensive policy document which serves as a blueprint for all of La Quinta and its annexable areas referred to as the Sphere of Influence (SOI). The General Plan functions as both a legal document and a guide for decision-making. The goals, policies, and programs identified within the General Plan document are shaped by both community interests and State law.

State law mandates that every city and county in California adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan. The law also identifies specific topics which general plans must address, such as the location and distribution of parks and recreational facilities, and whether such facilities are adequate.

Each component of the General Plan, called an "element," focuses on a specific topic. The La Quinta General Plan will contain five themed chapters that are further divided up into a number of different elements. These elements include Land Use, Traffic and Circulation, Housing, Sustainable Community, Parks and Recreation, Open Space Natural Resources, Economic Development, Noise, and Public Safety. Each element identifies goals, policies, and programs that affect how decisions and development are made in the City. The Parks and Recreation and Open Space elements, for example, contain many of the goals, policies, and programs that relate to Community Services.

As the guiding blueprint of the City, the General Plan must be more broad and comprehensive than other adopted plans or policy documents, such as the Community Services Master Plan. Virtually every ordinance, plan, or project approved by the City is required to conform to the General Plan. For example, the General Plan includes policies to provide adequate parkland and a land use map that identifies designated

parkland areas. The Community Services Master Plan then details and expands upon the General Plan by identifying what kind of programs or amenities should be offered in those parks.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS:**

Each of the General Plan elements begins with a section identifying their purpose and any pertinent legal requirements or findings that must be identified within the element. This is typically followed by a discussion of the available facilities or resources associated with that particular element. For example, the Parks and Recreation Element identifies all of the parks and recreational facilities in La Quinta. The element includes a section of policy and program discussion followed by projections and/or discussion of what will be needed in the future. Each element concludes with a statement of the goals, policies and programs to be implemented.

### **OPEN SPACE ELEMENT:**

Open space is defined as *"any parcel or area of land or water which is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use."* Open space can be for recreational use, habitat conservation, flood control, agriculture, resource extraction (such as mining), or simply just lands left undeveloped. The City has 18.2 square miles of Natural Open Space lands within the City limits and Sphere of Influence, mostly located along the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains.

The 2035 General Plan divides open space into two different categories, Recreational Open Space (OSR) and Natural Open Space (OSN). Natural Open Space is designated for uses such as habitat conservation, flood control and agriculture, but can also serve a recreational purpose, such as with the Fred Wolff Bear Creek Nature Preserve and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto National Monument. Recreational Open Space consists of those areas which have been developed into parks, playfields, and golf courses.

The Open Space Element contains goals, policies, and programs which are intended to promote and enhance existing resources and prevent development which could adversely affect mountain views and natural habitat.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION ELEMENT:**

The Parks and Recreation Element describes the existing parks and recreational facilities, identifies the current and projected demand for parks as the City and its Sphere of Influence grow, and establishes the goals, policies and programs needed to allow the City to continue to provide a full range of recreational amenities and services to its residents and businesses.

The City and its Sphere of Influence contain approximately 1,062 acres of developed parkland. When combined with public and private golf courses, this number increases

approximately 5,589 acres.

The Parks and Recreation Element includes a discussion of the role of the Community Services Master Plan, the City's Healthy Eating Active Living Campaign (HEAL), the importance of trails and connectivity, and identifies the projected need for additional parkland as the City's population grows. The element also features goals, policies, and programs that encourage access to parks, walkability, the consumption of healthy foods, access to farmer's markets, safe routes to schools, and interconnectivity to recreational facilities in adjacent cities.

### **THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL PLAN IN COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING:**

There are a number of goals, policies and programs throughout the General Plan which play a positive role in community health, recreation, and well-being. For example, the Traffic and Circulation Element will identify La Quinta's network of bicycle lanes, golf cart routes, and multi-purpose paths (commonly referred to as complete streets). The system of multi-purpose paths are intended to be shared by all users, including walkers, bicyclists, and equestrian riders, for both transportation and recreational purposes. The Land Use Element will identify provisions for accommodating walkable mixed-use and transit-oriented developments. The Sustainable Community Element will provide direction for the conservation of air and water resources, and the reduction of energy use and vehicle trips. The entire General Plan will contain principles that contribute to the City's interest in healthy and active living, in terms of land use, recreation, transportation, and conservation.

### **CONCLUSION:**

This study session review is provided to inform the Community Services Commission of the challenges and solutions and to reaffirm that the update is proceeding in a direction consistent with their vision for the City.

Staff is currently proceeding with the finalization of the General Plan document, including the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR). It is expected that the draft General Plan and General Plan EIR will be ready for public review and comment on July 6, 2012 and that public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council will occur in September. The General Plan EIR will be released for a 45-day public comment period, during which Staff plans to conduct an additional community outreach meeting in order to present the draft General Plan and EIR to the City's residents and businesses.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Edie Hylton  
Community Services Director